



# CSAP's Southwest CAPT Prevention Briefing

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**Providing support and resources for developing knowledge and expertise among prevention professionals and practitioners**

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## Guidelines for Balancing Program Fidelity/Adaptation

This six-step framework is excerpted from "Finding the Balance: Program Fidelity and Adaptation in Substance Abuse Prevention" by the National Center for the Advancement of Prevention, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, 2002 Conference Edition, pp 45-46. The full document is available online at <http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/modelprograms/pdfs/FindingBalance1pdf>

How do we implement an effective program with fidelity/loyalty and yet adapt it to fit our local audience? How much can we change a program and retain its effectiveness with confidence? What are the elements of the program that must be retained with integrity?

These questions and many more have surfaced about prevention program fidelity and adaptation. Little empirical research has been conducted on the issues regarding balancing fidelity and adaptation. While we do not yet know if these are precisely the steps for "setting the boundaries", the weight of evidence suggests that these steps lead in the right direction. These steps are:

**1. Identify and understand the theory base behind the program.** Published literature on the program should provide a description of its theoretical underpinnings; if not, an inquiry to the program developer may yield this information.

This may or may not include a logic model that describes in linear fashion how the program works. The theory and logic model are not in themselves core components of a program, but they can help identify what the core components are and how to measure them. This step also identifies core values or assumptions about the program that can be used to help persuade community stakeholders of the program's fit and importance for their environment.

**2. Obtain or conduct a core component analysis of the program.** This will provide implementers with a roster of the main "program ingredients," and at least some sense of which components are essential to likely success and which are more amenable to modification, given local conditions. In essence, core components analysis represents a bridge between developer and implementer, and between fidelity and adaptation. Ideally, the program developer or a third party will already have conducted the core components analysis. If not, with good information about the program, an implementer can at least approximate this informally.

The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), through its National Center for the Advancement of Prevention, is undertaking a large-scale core components analysis of effective and model programs. Checking to see if a selected program is in the database of CSAP's National Registry of Effective Prevention Programs (NREPP) is a first step in determining the status of a core components analysis. For online access to this database, go to [www.samhsa.gov/csap/modelprograms/](http://www.samhsa.gov/csap/modelprograms/).

**3. Assess fidelity/adaptation concerns for the particular implementation site.** This step means determining what adaptations may be necessary, given the target population, community environment, political and funding circumstances, etc. It also means determining what core components are especially critical to address fidelity, given these same circumstances.

**4. Consult with the program developer to review the above steps and how they have shaped a plan for implementing the program in a particular setting.** This may also include actual technical assistance from the developer or referral to peers who have implemented the program in somewhat similar settings.

**5. Consult with the organization and/or community in which the implementation will take place.** This is a process to allow fears and resistance to surface, to build support for the program, and to obtain input on how to do the implementation successfully.

**6. Develop an overall implementation plan based on these inputs.** Include a strategy for achieving and measuring fidelity/adaptation balance for the program to be implemented, both at the initial implementation and over time. By addressing all of the complex stages of implementation, such a plan can increase the opportunities for making choices that shape a program, while maintaining good fidelity.

To view the complete document, "Finding the Balance: Program Fidelity and Adaptation in Substance Abuse Prevention," visit <http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/modelprograms/pdfs/FindingBalance1.pdf>.

Southwest CAPT is one of 6 regional Centers funded by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. For more prevention information and resources, visit our website at [www.swcapt.org](http://www.swcapt.org) or call our offices toll free at 800-853-2572.